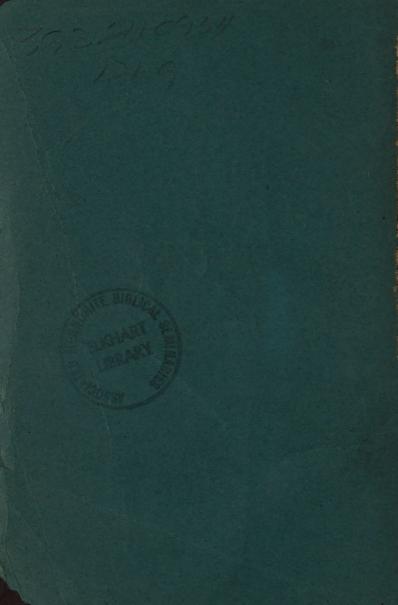




INDIAN NATURE MYTHS



mis Chilmer Chull

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INDIAN NATURE MYTHS

SHOVONA DEVI



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PREFACE

This book of Indian Nature Myths is, so far as I am aware, the first of its kind to be published. The Myths contained in its pages are fifty in number. They begin with Creation and end with Death, and are drawn from various sources, of which the most important are the "Vedas" (including the "Aitareya-," "Taittirya-" and "Shatapatha-Brâhmanas"); the Indian Epics, "Mahâbhârata" and "Râmâyana"; the "Purânas" and the classical Sanskrit literature; and, lastly, the Folk-lore of the country. The stories seek to explain natural phenomena, and many of them bear a marked resemblance to the fables of Greece and Rome, with which, no doubt, they have a common origin.

If this volume succeeds in arousing an interest in the little-known literature of Indo-Aryan Nature Myths I shall feel well rewarded for my labours.

SHOVONA DEVI.

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INDIAN NATURE MYTHS.

I. THE GOLDEN EGG OF CREATION.

In the beginning there was naught but darkness. The Sun was not, nor the Moon, nor the Stars. There was, as yet, neither Earth nor Heaven; North and South, East and West there was naught but darkness. Above and below and on all sides was the blackness of night. The darkness was such as could not have been pierced by the point of a needle.

Was this the Chaos-Hag of creation myths? Who can tell? But from the void there came forth an Egg of prodigious size which has been known for all time as the Hiranya-Garva, or Golden-Wombed, and was so called because it was radiant with the seed of Creation, and with the divine energy of Brahmâ the Creator. It was the Cosmic Egg, the Golden Egg of Creation from which all life was to come.

Ages came and ages went, how many no man can tell, when, lo! the Egg cracked and burst into three parts. The upper part became the Heaven of the Gods, the lower the Earth on which we live, while the intervening portion was transformed into the innumerable worlds which surround us. Thus came into existence the mighty Universe—the Bhur, Bhuvahand and Swah of the ancient Aryan Sun-hymn, the famous Gâyatri.¹

1 " Manu," i. 5.

II. THE ORIGIN OF THE MILKY WAY.

[In the Atharva-Veda (vi. 128. 4) the Milky Way is referred to as Cakadhama, i.e. King of the Asterisms, from the Sanskrit "Caka," King, and "Dhama," smoke, which the innumerable stars forming the Milky Way so much resemble as they stretch across the sky. The Milky Way has also been known as the celestial Ganges—the Mandakini—whilst by others it has been identified with Vaitarini, the Hindu Styx across which the souls of the dead are ferried to Yama's Paradise, the Hindu Hades.]

In ages past a mighty sage who was known as Vrihaspati, and has since become the planet Jupiter, was the attendant priest of Indra, the Slayer of Giants and King of the Gods. Now Vrihaspati had a wife of great charm and beauty who was known as Târâ, or the Star, and with whom the great Indra, attracted by the loveliness of her form and disposition, had fallen in love. Each morning before the Sun rose in the Heavens it was Târâ's habit to rise and bathe in the celestial river Mandâkini which flows through Nandan, the park of the Gods, by the foot of Kalpa-Taru, the Golden Tree of Wishes. This practice had become known to Indra, and one morning as she was returning from her usual bath in the holy river, her dripping garments gathered all about her, he of a sudden appeared and stood before her. Not knowing what to do, but anxious to rid herself of his presence, Târâ sought to drive off the God by shaking over him the moisture with which her clothes were saturated, and in so doing scattered drops of water on her pathway in the heavens. As each of the myriad particles of liquid fell it became a star of great brilliance,

and so was formed the Milky Way which all can see as it stretches like a stream of diamonds across the sky.¹

III. THE ORIGIN OF EARTHQUAKES.

[Not only earthquakes but tides and waves have been accounted for by the movements of the serpent Vâsuki, also called Ananta Nuga.]

The Sky, the castle of the Gods, rests upon the Air; the Air rests upon the Earth; the Earth is borne upon the Seas; the Seas themselves are supported by a gigantic tortoise, who in his turn is held aloft on one or other of the thousand hoods of the mighty serpent Vâsuki, which is said to proceed from the almighty Vishnu himself. Living deep down at the bottom of the eternal seas in the great Under-World, Vâsuki ever and always bears on a single hood the weight of the world, but when tired he has, perforce, to shift the enormous burden from one hood to another, and so is caused the commotion in earth and sea known as an Earthquake.²

IV. THE ORIGIN OF ECLIPSES.

It is said that once in their search for Nectar, the drink of the immortals, the Gods and Giants had churned the mighty ocean into froth. For a churning-stick they used the great Mount Mandar, while Vâsuki, the King

¹ Folk-lore

² The "Purânas."

of Snakes, suffered himself to be made the rope by which it was turned. After great toil the efforts of the Gods were crowned with success, and Dhanwantari, the physician of the Gods, filled a bowl with the precious liquid, which he was about to serve to the immortals, when Vishnu, who had for the time being transformed himself into the semblance of a Nymph of rare and entrancing beauty, offered to hand it round to the assembled Gods and Giants, who were bewitched by the charms of the supposed damsel. Now it so happened that the Gods and Giants sat in separate rows facing one another, and the Nymph not unnaturally served the Gods first as befitted their superior rank. But when she had attended to the needs of the Gods, what was the surprise and indignation of the Giants to see her raise the cup to her own lips and drink to the last drop what was left!

Now it so happened that amongst the Gods there was one of the Giants who had assumed their shape and so had secured a draught of the divine potion. But the Sun and Moon, the guardians of the skies, had noticed the trick which he had practised and told the Gods how they had been outwitted. Incensed by the action of the Giant, Vishnu, with one stroke of his mighty discus, severed his head from his body. The Giant, however, had secured the gift of immortality by virtue of the draught of Nectar which he had swallowed, and so it was that the two portions of his body continued to exist. The trunk became the dreaded Kétu, or Comet of evil omen to Gods and Mortals alike, whilst the head was ever after known as Râhu, or the Devourer, which at intervals of time swallows the Sun or the Moon. Nor does it let go of either until, affrighted by the blowing of conches and the beating of gongs, it believes that the Gods are in pursuit.

Such is the explanation of the Eclipse.1

V. WHY THE SUN DOES NOT BURN US.

ONCE upon a time Vinatâ, daughter of a Demi-urge, had, strange to relate, laid two eggs. Too impatient to wait for them to be hatched, she foolishly broke open one of them, and to her consternation found a half-formed eagle, refulgent as the sun, inside the shell. Filled with curiosity the Gods crowded round the mammoth bird and fell to discussing what had best be done with it. Whilst they were thus occupied Râhu, for the first time, attacked the Sun with mouth agape. The Sun did its best to escape, and the Gods, having their attention drawn from the feathered monster before them, roared with laughter at the sight. So much enraged was the Sun when he heard them that he shot down his rays upon them and threatened to consume them with fire.

Unable to resist the intense heat which menaced them, the Gods sought to shield themselves with Arunâ, for such was the name of the ill-shapen bird, and placed him in front of the Sun, whose charioteer he became. And thus day by day he drives the chariet of the Sun, harnessed to a team of seven milk-white steeds, through the heavens, and protects Gods and Mortals alike from the fiery rays which would otherwise destroy them.²

¹ The "Mahâbhârata" and "Purânas."

² Ibid.

VI. WHY THE SERPENT'S TONGUE IS FORKED.

[A variant of this myth, perhaps the origin of it, is that of the Sheyna Bird, or Eagle, fetching the Soma juice from Mount Majavana, otherwise Heaven, to enable Indra to kill the dragon Vritra, by renewing his exhausted strength with it.]

VINATÂ, the mother of Arunâ, had a sister named Kadru. Now Kadru had laid a full thousand eggs, whereas Vinatâ, as we have seen, had laid but two. And from the eggs of Kadru was born the race of snakes.

It is related of the two sisters that they were present at the churning of the seas when the Gods sought for and found Nectar, the draught of immortality. Then it was that a nine-mouthed steed, rising from the sea, neighed so loudly that ever afterwards it was known as Uchaishravâ, or the One who Neighs Loudly. When the sisters heard it they laid wagers with each other as to its colour. Kadru said it was black and Vinatâ that it was white, and it was settled that whoever was in the wrong should become the slave of the other.

White it proved to be, and so Vinatâ should have won the wager; but Kadru, not willing to be the loser, bade her thousand snake children go and coil themselves round the horse's tail. This they did and their venomous breath turned the steed completely black, so giving the victory to Kadru, whose slave Vinatâ became from that time forward in accordance with the compact.

In the course of time Vinatâ's second egg broke open, and, lo! there came from within it another mighty

Eagle ¹ or Gorura, fully fledged and well formed. Straight from the egg the resplendent bird flew to Kadru and prayed for his mother's release.

"With each cycle of the Moon the Nectar of the Gods is renewed," answered Kadru. "Go thou, Gorura, and bring to me the Moon-bowl filled with the draught of immortality, and no longer shall thy mother be my slave."

Away flew Gorura towards the Moon, and as he went the sweep of his mighty wings shook the hills and forests as if by an earthquake. The seas, too, were tossed to and fro until waves of mountain height covered the face of the waters. Higher and higher flew Gorura until at length he reached the Moon; but his difficulties were not yet over, for many obstacles had to be overcome before he could become possessed of the coveted bowl of Nectar. All around the Moon was an enormous fire with flames rising to a stupendous height; but, undeterred by this apparently insurmountable obstacle, Gorura transformed his body into pure gold, and so passed through the fiery element unscathed. But hardly had one peril been overcome before another presented itself, and Gorura saw in front of him the discus of Vishnu revolving at so great a speed that if a bee had tried to pass through it would have been cut into a thousand pieces in the attempt. But here again Gorura triumphed, for he so attenuated his body that it passed between the spokes of the discus without difficulty. Elated with his success Gorura seized the Moon-bowl in his claws, and with one mighty flight passed over both the discus and the flames on his way back to Earth; but he had not gone far before Indra observed him, and loosed a thunderbolt, which

¹ The eagle is sacred to Vishnu.

stopped the giant bird in his course, causing one of his golden feathers to drop out. "What doest thou, Gorura?" said the God. "Is it that thou really desirest to make immortal thy mother's enemies? And dost thou think the Gods will suffer thee to take from them the Nectar of which they have need?"

"Nay, O Indra, such is not my intention," Gorura made answer. "First, I pray thee, let me free my mother from bondage, and then do thou regain possession of the Nectar, as surely thou canst."

And with these words the giant Eagle flew to earth, not knowing that Indra, now invisible, was in close attendance. Arriving on the lawn of Kusha grass in front of Kadru's house, which shook from end to end at his approach, he put down the Moon-bowl. Gorura's compact was now fulfilled, and his mother Vinatâ was set free amidst scenes of great rejoicing. Overjoyed, too, were the Snake folk at the prospect of speedily obtaining the precious gift of immortality. Before drinking the Nectar, however, they repaired, in accordance with an ancient custom, to a sacred stream for a ceremonial bath. Taking advantage of their absence, Indra seized the bowl and carried back the precious liquid to Heaven.

The disappointment of Kadru and her snake children on their return can be more easily imagined than described, and the latter at once began to lick up the drops which had fallen on the sharp-edged blades of Kusha grass.

In so doing their tongues were slit, and so it comes about that to this day all serpents' tongues are forked.¹

¹ The "Mahâbhârata" and "Purânas."

VII. WHY THERE IS NO FIRE WITHOUT SMOKE.

THE mixing of the Draught of Immortality had created bad blood between the Gods and Giants, as we have already seen. For had not the Gods by treachery robbed the Giants of their just share of Nectar which both had earned? For long the Giants brooded over their wrongs until, determined to suffer no longer, they decided to wage war against the celestial beings.

Now there was a certain giant, Târakâ, on whom Brahmâ the Creator had conferred the gift of invincibility as a reward for his devoted services. Armed with this power, Târakâ had dispossessed Indra and other Gods of their rightful places in Heaven. In their distress they made appeal to Brahmâ, who, not for the first time, had caused trouble by his indiscretion in granting favours to the enemies of Heaven.

"Think ye, O Gods," replied Brahmâ, "that I could or would withdraw a boon which I had once given? Who is there among you that would uproot a tree which he himself had planted? Mahâdeva the Destroyer can, of course, encompass the destruction of Târakâ when the appointed time comes for him to destroy the Universe. But the hour for this has not yet arrived. There is, however, a chance that, should Mahâdeva beget a son, the latter may inherit sufficient of his father's power to put an end to him you hate."

Now the Gods, hearing the words of Brahmâ, remembered that Mahâdeva had lately taken to wife one Umâ, daughter of Himâlaya, King of the Mountains

and was now with her somewhere in the wood of Alakâ. Unaware of his exact whereabouts, they sent their messenger Agni, or Fire, to find him. After some days Agni, who had assumed the semblance of a pigeon, surprised the divine couple in the forest, and Umâ catching sight of him started to upbraid him. "O Agni," spake she, "thou who hast stolen thy way hither to spy on us, I tell thee that from this day forth thou shalt suffer from leprosy as a punishment for what thou hast done."

And from that day the brightness of Fire has been clouded with smoke, that is, with the black and white patches of leprosy.¹

VIII. WHY FIRE CONSUMES ALL THINGS.

In ages past, Vrigu, the spiritual son of Brahmâ, had taken to wife a damsel named Pulamâ. Despite the fact that his bride had already been betrothed by her father to a Giant, Vrigu had succeeded in winning her affections and had married her. Naturally the Giant took the matter much to heart, and one day, during the absence of Vrigu, he laid his hands on the newlywedded bride with the object of carrying her off. At this Pulamâ screamed out, saying: "Get thee away, thou art not my lawfully-wedded Lord." Thereupon the Giant, hoping to allay her scruples, turned to the Altar Fire. "O God Agni," said he, "thou who standest witness to the weddings of mortals, do thou tell this damsel whether or no she is mine by virtue of our betrothal."

 $^{^1}$ Kâlidâsa's '' Kumâr-Shamvava '' (The Birth of the Warrior God),

The Fire God was much perturbed by the question, and hesitated before replying. "Dost thou not know, O Giant," spoke he at last, "the difference between a betrothal and a marriage? The former may be revoked, but the latter never can be. Vrigu has married her to whom thou wert betrothed, and she therefore now belongs to him."

Enraged at the answer, the Giant roughly seized hold of Pulamâ, who, stunned by his violence, gave birth to a child before its time. The new-born babe, refulgent as the sun, turned its angry gaze upon the Giant, who was at once transformed to ashes.

Shortly afterwards Vrigu returned home, and Pulamâ with tears in her eyes told him what had happened. Greatly incensed at what he heard, Vrigu, under the mistaken idea that the Altar Fire was to blame, pronounced a curse upon it, saying, "O Agni, thou who in the past hast consumed only what was pure in the burnt offerings made to the Gods shalt from to-day consume all things good and bad and be known as 'Sarva-Vuk' or 'The Devourer of All Things'." 1

IX. THE ORIGIN OF THUNDER.

[Vritra, or the Drought Demon, referred to in the following story, represents the rain-cloud which refused to give up its waters, the word Vritra being derived from the Sanskrit Vri, to cover. Indra, or the Rain God, from the Sanskrit Ind, to rain, burst open the rain-cloud with his thunderbolt, and so released the rain and fertilized the soil.]

THE Giants, brooding over their grievances against the Gods, had never ceased to rebel more or less openly

¹ The "Mahâbhârata" and "Purânas."

against them. From time to time one or other of the most powerful amongst them would take up arms against the Gods and try to wrest Heaven from them. Conspicuous amongst the Giants was one Vritra, who gained victory after victory over his oppressors, for so he regarded the Gods. The latter in their distress sought the advice of Brahmâ, before whom they were wont to lay their troubles. As a remedy Brahmâ suggested forging Thunder from the bones of a mighty Sage named Dadhichi, and that the Gods should use the new weapon against their enemies. Anxious to follow the counsel given by Brahmâ, the Gods repaired to the Sage forthwith and placed the matter before him.

"Ye want my bones, O Gods," said Dadhichi, "and verily I am little more than a skeleton as the result of the privations which I have imposed on myself, and which might have appalled even the ascetic God Mahâdeva. I have but little time to live, and if my bones can be of service to you I offer them now." So saying, the good man placed himself in an attitude of devotion, and uttering a last prayer to his Maker voluntarily ceased breathing, as other Indian Sages have been known to do.¹

The Gods paid the honours due to the dead and then took the bones to Vishwakarmâ, the Artisan of Heaven, who forged from them the Thunder, which, endowed with the spiritual attributes of the Sage, furnished them with a weapon to overcome Vritra and so recover the Heaven which he had filched from them.

Such is the story of the forging of Thunder.2

¹ The well-known Vevekânanda may be cited as an instance.

² The "Mahâbhârata" and "Purânas."

X. HOW THE MOUNTAINS BECAME FIXED TO THE EARTH.

TIME was when the mountains had the power of flight, and would often flit from one place to another. Sometimes they would obstruct the light of the Sun or the Moon, and so cause darkness to cover the Earth.

It was Indra with his thunderbolt who cleft their wings and robbed them of their power of movement. Ever since have they remained bound to the Earth.

One of them, however, Mainâk, son of Himâlaya, hid himself in the sea, and so escaped from Indra. His descendants became floating rocks—call them icebergs if you will—which still roam from sea to sea.¹

XI. WHY THE VINDHYA HILLS ARE LOW.

[Agastya, who is referred to in the following story, and Atri were the two Sages who are said to have been the first to cross the Vindhya Hills. They it was who introduced Aryan culture and civilisation into the Deccan. The expression an "Agastyan" voyage or journey has passed into common use, and means one from which the traveller never returns.]

MOUNT SUMÉRU is wrought of gold and is the Paradise of Brahmâ, the God of Creation. Ever and always does the Sun go round and round the sacred hill, and this fact is said to have aroused the jealousy of Mount Vindhya, who arrogantly demanded of the Sun, "Why dost thou not encircle me as thou dost Suméru?"

¹ The "Mahâbhârata."

"I am unable to do so," replied the Sun, "for my path is marked out for me by Brahmâ himself and cannot be changed."

Enraged at this answer, Vindhya reared his head to the sky. The Sun could not rise, nor the Moon, and darkness covered the Heavens and the Earth. The Gods were affrighted and knew not what to do. In the end they sought the advice of Agastya the Sage.

Agastya listened to that which the Gods had to tell him and then went to Mount Vindhya. Now when Vindhya saw the Sage approaching he lowered his crest and bowed down before him. Of a sudden out came the Sun, shedding its golden radiance over Suméru, and bringing light and good cheer to Gods and Mortals alike.

"Do thou stay as thou art with lowered head, Vindhya, until I return again," said the Sage, as he raised his hand to give a blessing. But Agastya never more returned, and, although centuries have passed, Vindhya with lowered head still awaits him.

And so it is that the Vindhya Hills are low.1

XII. THE ORIGIN OF THE MOON'S CHANGES.

In days of old a Demi-urge named Dakshya sprang from the little finger of Brahmâ, God of Creation. Now this Dakshya had a large family, as might be expected of one who had Brahmâ for his father, and as many as twenty-seven of his daughters had married the Moon-God, Soma. Another daughter, Sati of blessed memory, had become the consort of Mahâdeva the Destroyer.

Now of all his wives the Moon-God loved Rohini most, and towards the others showed not the affection which was their due. So some of them approached their father Dakshya and complained to him of their husband's indifference. Filled with wrath, Dakshya hastened to the Moon-God and upbraided him, saying, "O Soma, why didst thou marry many wives if thou couldst not share thy love equally amongst them? As thou hast not done so, I tell thee that thy heart, the seat of the affections, shall waste and wither away." And lo! hardly had the words been uttered when the Moon shrank to a crescent. Struck with terror, the Moon-God fled for protection to his son-in-law, Mahâdeva, who welcomed him and set him high on his forehead, whence he is known as the "Crescent-crested."

As time passed the daughters of Dakshya began to pine for the Moon their husband, and once again approaching their father said, "O Father, even a lack-love husband is better than none at all. So restore to us, we pray you, our lord the Moon-God."

Filled with sorrow, Dakshya once more made his way to the Moon and thus addressed him: "O my son, I rue the curse which I pronounced on thee, for has it not brought misery on my daughters? But, though the word of a God cannot be revoked, yet will I do what I can to mitigate thy sufferings. Once a month shalt thou recover thy former roundness of shape and enjoy the company of thy wives, my daughters."

And ever since in fulfilment of this promise hath the Moon waxed and waned each month.1

¹ The "Mahâbhârata."

XIII. HOW GANGA CAME DOWN TO EARTH.

[The Ganges, as all know, is one of the sacred rivers of India, and has, indeed, attained greater sanctity in the eyes of orthodox Hindus than any of the others for several reasons. Firstly, it was on the banks of the Ganges that the Indo-Aryans made their first settlements and performed their sacrificial rites. Again, the great river, flowing from the Himûlayas, where dwells the God Siva or Mahûdeva, passes through many of the countries and provinces of India, and so provided water for the crops and cattle of the Aryan settlers. And, lastly, in the basins of the Ganges and the Jumnû were developed those Indo-Aryan systems of civilisation and philosophy, law and religion which still attract the admiration of the world.

It is worthy of note that the time for letting loose the Ashwa-medha, or sacrificial horse, referred to in the following myth, was invariably during the Easter full moon. This fact has not, perhaps, sufficiently engaged the attention of historians, and one is led to speculate whether it may not also have been the season during which the Indo-European migration took place.]

ONCE upon a time there was a famous Prince, Sagara, who was the proud father of sixty thousand sons. The birth of these children was miraculous. The story goes that, his wife having given birth to a pumpkin, the Prince in his disappointment ordered it to be cast away, but at that very moment came a voice from the clouds, saying, "Hark, O Prince, for as many seeds as are in that pumpkin so many sons shalt thou have." And the seeds in the pumpkin numbered sixty thousand. And so Sagara was happy as never father was.

In order to show his gratitude Sagara had been in the habit of sacrificing horses to the Gods, and the time had come when but one more sacrifice was needed to complete the hundred. A special date was chosen, probably, as was the ancient custom, the time of the Easter full moon, and the sacrificial horse was let loose and followed from place to place by an army led by the sixty thousand sons of Sagara.

Now Indra had gained his high position amongst the Gods by a hundred such sacrifices and could not brook the idea of a rival. He, therefore, determined to frustrate Sagara's plans, and like a thief in the night stole the horse and put it to graze near by the mighty Sage Kapilâ, who, undisturbed by the din and bustle of the outer world, was then engaged in meditation in the Pâtâla or Under-World.

Needless to say the horse was quickly missed, and the sons of Sagara searched for it from one end of the world to the other. But it was all in vain, and they had, perforce, to return and tell their father of their failure. On hearing their news the Prince was greatly angered and said to his sons, "The horse must be recovered or the hundredth sacrifice on which I have set my heart cannot be accomplished. If it is not to be found on Earth it must be sought for in the Under-World. Whatever ye do, ye are not to come back without it."

Thus ordered by their father the sons started baling out the sea and shovelling away the sand in order to make for themselves a passage to the Under-World. On their way they destroyed many strange and curious sea monsters, whose remains, known as fossils, are still to be found in the strata or layers of the Earth. At length, after mighty labours, they succeeded in reaching the Under-World, where they found the horse grazing not far from the Sage Kapilâ. With loud cries of "Here is the thief!" they aroused Kapilâ from his meditations. The Sage, thus disturbed, raised his eyes, and fixed them on the greatly-daring sons of Sagara who turned to ashes beneath his gaze! Thus it was that the sacrifice could not be consummated, and Indra had gained his object.

Time went by and Vâgirath, a grandson of Sagara, brought down Gangâ to wash and purify the ashes of his sixty thousand uncles. Gangâ then flowed down from Heaven, but lest harm should come to Earth Mahâdeva broke the fall of her waters by receiving them on his head. Thus for the second time had this God saved all created beings, for once before Mahâdeva had swallowed poison, and thus gained the name of "blue-throated," in order that he might keep disaster from the world.

On her way to the Under-World Gangâ met with no obstacles until she came to the foot of the Himâlayas, where her further progress was obstructed. In her difficulty Gangâ appealed to Airâvath, the great four tusked elephant of Indra, to help her by ripping up the mountains with his tusks and so making a passage for her. This the wily elephant refused to do unless Gangâ first promised to be his wife. Meeting craft with craft Gangâ made pretence of agreeing to his request, and in a trice the elephant had ripped up the mountains. The obstruction once removed, Gangâ poured through the passage with terrific force, carrying the elephant with her for miles and miles. Almost drowned by the torrent he at last managed to escape alive to Heaven, but never more did he dare to look on the face of Gangâ.

After full many another adventure Gangâ reached the Under-World and cleansed with her purifying waters

the ashes of the sons of Sagara. Thereafter did Gangâ elect to remain on earth, and in due time came to be worshipped as a Goddess. Long afterwards she married Shântanu, Prince of the Lunar race, and bore him a son, Vishma of Mahâbhârata fame.

Such is the story of the sacred river.1

XIV. HOW THE SQUIRREL GOT HIS STRIPED · COAT.

[The following story has come into proverbial use. A certain Indian Prince, when making a magnificent donation to one of the War Funds, is reported to have said, " Like the squirrel in the Râmâyana I offer my humble quota of dust."]

Long, long ago there lived at Ayodhyâ a chivalrous young Prince, whose adventures are recorded in the famous epic named after him—the Râmâyana. Râma, for such was his name, claimed descent from the Sun God himself, and so great was his strength that against all comers at a tournament he alone drew the ends of a mighty bow together until it snapped in twain, thus winning for himself a peerless bride of miraculous birth, Sitâ.

Now amongst those who, amidst the jeers and laughter of the onlookers, had failed to bend the bow was Râvana, the ten-headed and twenty-armed King of the Demons, who ruled over the sea-girt isle of Lankâ.2 Smarting under his defeat Râvana went away pondering how best he might be revenged against his rival. He had not long to wait, however, and his opportunity came in this wise.

¹ The "Mahabharata."

Râma's father, Dasharatha, who reigned at Ayodhyâ, feeling the burden of his years, wished to resign his throne in Râma's favour, but in the end, yielding to a palace intrigue, the old king turned against Râma and banished him to the woods. With Râma went Sitâ, his wife, and his younger brother, Lakshmana, who had been his constant companion in their adventures against the Râkshasas or Ogres.

One day, as the three exiles were sitting in front of their forest home, a golden deer suddenly appeared from out the wood and then as quickly disappeared. Sitâ, attracted by the beauty of the animal, asked her lord to catch it for her, whereat Râma, who was quickly followed by Lakshmana, got up and gave chase. Râvana, who happened to be near, seized his chance of revenge and carried off the unprotected Sitâ in his aerial chariot. Naturally Sitâ was terrified, but yet preserved enough presence of mind to drop one by one the jewels which adorned her person, so that Râma finding them might have a clue to the route by which she was being taken. Hearing Sitâ's screams, the brothers hastened back to find that she had gone, but quickly espying the jewels they followed them through the forest to the sea. Right across the sea shone out the golden city of Lankâ, where lived the King of the Demons, and here Râma felt sure his wife had been taken; but how was he to cross the water, for there was neither boat nor bridge? Luckily the monkeys of the forest, headed by Hanuman, Angad and Neil, took pity on him, and got to work to build the bridge across the straits between India and Ceylon which still goes by his name—Shwetabandhan-Râmeshwara (Adam's Bridge as it is now called).

A tiny squirrel, who had been watching the monkeys at work, conceived the idea of helping them. Running into the sea he made his fur wet, and then rolling over on the beach collected a certain amount of sand on his body, which he ran and shook on to the bridge. Râma was so struck with the devotion of the little animal that he stroked him affectionately, and to this day the squirrel has a striped coat showing where the fingers of Râma caressed him.¹

XV. WHY THE MONKEY HAS BLACK FACE, HANDS AND FEET.

BEFORE the monkeys began building the bridge Râma called them together and thus spoke to them: "What will your labour avail you if Sitâ be not on yonder isle? Let one of you get across and ascertain if she is really there."

Thus adjured, the monkeys tried one by one to get across, but without success until the turn of Hanumân, King of the Monkeys, came. Lifting his arms to heaven, as if asking the Gods to help him, he made a gigantic leap which cleared the sea and landed him on the island at a single bound. Wasting no time, he at once sought out Sitâ in the Ashoka grove where she was kept a close prisoner, and, eluding the vigilance of her guards, showed her Râma's ring which he had brought with him. Reassured by the sight Sitâ began to relate the story of her woes, but as she was doing so some of the guards noticed Hanumân's tail hanging down from the tree in which

¹ The "Râmâyana."

he was hiding. Quickly giving the alarm they caught hold of the Monkey-King's tail and tried to pull him down, but all in vain. They then thought of another plan, and, winding strips of cloth round Hanumân's tail, poured oil on it and set fire to it. It flared up speedily, and the monkey, leaping from the tree, jumped from house to house in his agony until at last the whole city was in flames. Racked with pain Hanumân tried to blow out the flame, which only flared up the more and blackened his face. Next he tried to extinguish the fire with hands and feet, which also were burnt black without his object being attained. At last, in despair, he jumped into the sea, which quickly put out the flames. He was then able to make his way swiftly to Râma with the news of Sitâ's whereabouts.

Ever afterwards the descendants of Hanuman have had black faces, hands and feet.¹

XVI. WHY THE CROW IS BLIND IN ONE EYE.

[The crow is said to be the offspring of Indra, and therefore to possess divine blood. On ceremonial occasions it is the custom to give a feast to the bird for good luck. In folk-lore the crow figures constantly.]

BEFORE Sitâ was carried off by Râvana she had been living an ideal life with her husband in the forest. Slaking her thirst at the crystal streams and appearing her hunger with luscious fruits and wild honey, she wandered at will through the woods in search of wild flowers, and making friends with the animals who lived

¹ The "Râmâyana."

there. No wood-nymph could have led a happier existence than she did.

One day, tired out with her wanderings, she had fallen asleep, and Râma her husband was keeping watch over her with bow and arrow close at hand in case they were needed. They were there but a short time when a crow, which had perched itself on a bough overhead, flew down on to Sitâ and began to peck at her breast. Without a moment's hesitation Râma shot an arrow at the audacious bird, hitting it in the eye. From that day forward crows have been blind in one eye, and if you watch one of them carefully you will see him turning his head from side to side when examining anything which has aroused his curiosity.¹

XVII. THE ORIGIN OF FIRE.

ERE the work of creation had begun the universe was a void, and oppressed with a sense of loneliness the Creator decided to people it. First he created Fire, or Agni, but no sooner had he made it than with its tongues of flame it made efforts to consume the Creator himself.

"Ah!" thought the Author of all things, "Before creating the fire I should have produced something for it to feed on," and, deep in thought, the Creator rubbed the palms of his hands together, when, lo! butter was formed between them, and dropping into the mouth of the Fire appeared its hunger. And so to this day sacrificial and altar fires are fed with butter.

¹ The "Râmâyana" and "Narasingha-Purâna."

When rubbing his palms together the Creator had divested them of hair, and following the pattern of their Maker the palms of men are also hairless.

Such is the account handed down to us of the origin of Fire.¹

XVIII. THE ORIGIN OF SEA-FOAM.

As we have already heard,² Indra, the Slayer of Giants, had killed the demon Vritra with the thunderbolt which had been wrought from the bones of the mighty Sage, Dadhichi. After he had been slain Indra was seized with compunction, for he remembered that Vritra was thought to have the blood of Brahmâ in his veins, and by killing him he might have committed a most grievous sin. Filled with remorse he knew not what to do to rid himself of the crime. At last the waters of the ocean washed away his sin, which, thenceforth, assumed the appearance of Foam. And so it is that all Foam, whether it belongs to salt or fresh water, is but a representation of the sin of Indra.

Such was the origin of Foam.3

XIX. THE ORIGIN OF THE DATE-PALM.

ONCE upon a time there was a set of men who posed as saints, calling themselves Yatis, or Eremites. But these men were indifferent to God, and did not profess

^{1 &}quot;'Shatapatha-Brâhmana."

² Myth IX.

³ Sayana on the "Rig-Veda" (iii. 5, 4, 7.).

the Vedantic Creed, "God in All and All in God." Neither did they offer sacrifices to Indra and his brother Gods. So they incurred the displeasure of Indra, who forthwith cut them into pieces which he threw to the wild dogs. Mad with hunger the savage animals tore open the skulls of the Yatis, and as these were strewn on the ground they took root and grew into Date-Palms, the leafy tops of which so much resemble heads of hair.¹

XX. THE ORIGIN OF GOLD.

[A golden gift is always present at Hindu weddings, and at death a piece of gold is placed on the tongue of the corpse as toll for the Ferryman, who brings the soul across Vaitarini (the Indian Styx) to the Paradise of Yama.]

In the beginning Water covered the face of the Earth. Then came the Fire, or male Agni, and united itself with the Water, or female Apa. The sparks of its radiance thrown off into the water became sands of gold, and hence it is that the precious metal is so often found in the beds of streams.

From this it is seen that Gold is the offspring of Fire and Water. The complexion of the Vedic Gods is golden and the metal itself is sacred, wherefore no Hindu wears gold on his feet.²

^{1 &}quot;Taittitariya-Sanhita" (ii. 4. 9. 2.).

² "Shatapatha-Brâhmana," (2. 1. 1. 5.).

XXI. WHY THE COBRA'S HOOD IS MARKED.

In days long long gone by there lived Kangsha, a halfgiant and tyrant of Mathurâ. Now Kangsha was greatly attached to his sister, Devaki, and on the occasion of her marriage to Vasudeva he offered to escort the bridal pair in his chariot to their new home. As they were on their way, however, a voice floated down the wind, saying, "O Kangsha, beware, for surely shalt thou be slain by a son born of thy sister." Immediately Kangsha swerved the chariot round and drove the newly-married couple to a castle where he kept them close prisoners. Yet, strange to relate, when his destined slayer, Krishna, was born, all the guards fell asleep, and Vasudeva taking the new-born babe in his arms left Mathurâ unobserved. It was night and a storm was brewing when the father and child reached the bank of the Jumna. The river was running high, but, lo! the infant Krishna pushed out a baby foot and all was still, and at the same moment a jackal was seen crossing the river as if to show the way. Following the lead thus given, Vasudeva got safely across with the babe in his arms. Once on the other side, he no longer felt anxiety for the safety of the divine child, and wending his way to the house of one Nanda, a friendly shepherd, he left the babe with him and returned to the castle.

Kangsha, having discovered what had happened, but not knowing where the infant had been concealed, ordered a general massacre of all the children in Mathurâ who had been born on the same day as Krishna, thus hoping to kill his destined foe. But the voice which had already warned him of future danger again spoke,

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saying: "O Kangsha, thy future murderer is to be found amongst the shepherds of Gokul." Straightway Kangsha sent evil women there to encompass the death of Krishna, but the divine child turned against them the very means which they sought to use for his destruction. Foiled in his attempts, Kangsha sent another agent, again a woman, with instructions to lure the boy, as he now was, to his death by other means.

Now it so happened that a huge serpent, Kâliya, dwelt in the Jumnâ, whose waters were poisoned by it so that no man or animal dare drink thereof. One day it chanced that Krishna was grazing his cattle by the river side, and the woman, seizing her opportunity, approached and began telling stories about the giant snake, until she had fired his boyish ambition to encounter it.

Krishna, fearless of danger, climbed up a Kadamba tree which stood on the river bank, and thence, flute in hand, jumped down to give battle to the snake. No sooner did the monster see Krishna, than hissing fiercely and belching out flames of deadliest poison from its nostrils, it lifted up its hood a jojon 1 high, and darting its forked tongue in and out, made with lightning speed for the boy. But Krishna was too quick, and, avoiding the mighty onrush, jumped lightly on to the beast's head, where he began to dance and to play sweet music on his flute. The snake, conquered by the music, lowered its head, and to this day the Cobra bears on its hood the markings made by the footprints of Krishna.²

¹ A mythical mile.

² The "Mahâbhârata."

XXII. THE ORIGIN OF THE PALASHA TREE.

[There are three versions of this Myth, which bears a striking resemblance to the legend of Prometheus stealing fire from Heaven: (1) the Aitareya-Brahmû account, (2) the Shatapatha, and (3) the Rig-Veda story. In the Aitareya account the Soma grew among the Gandharvas, who were enamoured of the society of Nymphs. The Gods, knowing their weakness, transformed a Goddess into a damsel of surpassing beauty and obtained the Soma in exchange for her.

According to the Shatapatha version the Goddess Gâyatri had carried away the Soma but was overtaken by the Gandharvas, into whose possession it fell. From them it was obtained by the same artifice as above.

The Rig-Veda rendering makes it appear that the Goddess Gâyatri, disguised as an eagle, filched the Soma from Heaven itself.

Still another variant of the story is the legend of Gorura and the Moon-bowl of Nectar (Myth VI.)—the Sanskrit word "Soma" meaning both "Moon" and "Soma plant."]

ONCE upon a time the Gods spake to the Goddess Gâyatri, saying, "Go thou, Gâyatri, and fetch the Soma vine for Indra." Assuming the guise of an eagle Gâyatri started on her quest for the holy vine, which grew on a celestial mountain named Mûjavana. On her arrival in Heaven the Goddess found the vine well guarded, but in spite of this she seized it with her eagle's beak and flew off with it, uttering cries.

Attracted by the noise, one of the guards, Krishânu by name, discovered the Goddess as she was carrying off the precious plant, and shot an arrow at her which missed its mark but knocked one of the leaves from off the vine. This fell on the earth and grew into the . Palâsha tree with its bunches of crimson flowers.

XXIII. WHY HEAVEN IS SO FAR ABOVE THE EARTH.

ONCE upon a time Heaven and Earth were joined together. So close was Heaven that it could be touched by one's hand. But Heaven was not large enough for all the Gods who lived in it, and they were pressed for room. So with a loud voice they cried, "Vitayé" (extend and expand), when lo! at their command Heaven rose high above the Earth and stretched out into space. So greatly did it extend that, pursue it as far as you will, the boundary line between earth and sky gets no nearer.¹

XXIV. WHY THE MOON DOES NOT APPEAR ON THE NIGHT OF THE NEW MOON.

This is the story which is told to explain why no Moon is seen during the New Moon night. Growing larger, phase by phase, the Moon at last reaches its full, or, in other words, the Moon-bowl becomes filled to overflowing with the Nectar of the Gods. Then on the New Moon night the Sun sucks dry the Moon, even as the bees consume the honey in the honey-comb.

Filled with terror the Moon flees to earth and tries to hide herself amid its waters and plants. Thus are the tides formed and the trees provided with sap. On the following night she ventures to make an appearance, but far away in the West, as if fearing another encounter

^{1 &}quot;Shatapatha-Brâhmana" (i. 3. 3. and i. 22. 23.).

with her tormentor in the East. This is the reason why we see no Moon on the New Moon night.¹

XXV. THE ORIGIN OF WHEAT AND BARLEY.

In times gone by it was the custom of the Gods to make human sacrifices. On one occasion, however, as the victim was slain, the Spirit of Sacrifice which was in him left his body and entered into that of a horse.

The horse was slain and the Spirit of Sacrifice left its body and entered into that of an ox.

The ox was slain and the Spirit of Sacrifice left its body and entered into that of a sheep.

The sheep was slain and the Spirit of Sacrifice left its body and entered into that of a goat; but when the goat was slain the Spirit of Sacrifice entered the Earth. Thereupon the Earth was dug up, and, lo! the Gods found the Spirit of Sacrifice transformed into Wheat and Barley.

This is the story of the origin of the two staple cereals of India.²

XXVI. THE PARTRIDGE AND THE SPARROW.

In olden times there was born to Twashtâ, the Artisan of the Gods, a son who was possessed of six eyes and three mouths, and so he was called Vishwarupa, or the Many-shaped.

¹ "Shatapatha-Brâhmana" (i. 5. 3. 5; 15; 17).

² "Shatapatha-Brâhmana" (i. 2. 1. 6-9).

With one mouth the monster used to consume drink reserved for the Gods; with another he was wont to sip the juice of the Soma vine, and the third was set apart for solid food.

Now Vishwarupa was hostile to Indra, and the latter, losing patience, severed his head from his body with one blow of his mighty thunderbolt, when lo! out of his first mouth was born the sparrow, or Kalabinka, which always twitters to itself as if it had partaken of strong drink.

Out of the Soma-drinking mouth there came the Kopinjal, or Châtaka, a fabulous bird said to live on raindrops, and yellow as the Soma vine.

Lastly, from the third mouth there flew the Partridge, or Tittiri. Now Partridges are of many different kinds, but generally have wings spotted with white (butter) and red (honey), because they came from the mouth which Vishwarupa used for various foods.1

XXVII. THE ORIGIN OF THE SPIDER.

In days of yore the Titans, knowing that they were the offspring of the same parent, Prajapati, or Lord of Creation, as the Gods, became puffed up with pride, and began to hatch plans for the invasion of Heaven. But pride goes before a fall, as the saving is, and the case of the Titans was no exception.

Their scheme was to erect a mighty tower which should reach from Earth to Heaven, and by which they might enter the kingdom of the Gods. Their minds made up,

^{1 &}quot;Shatapatha-Brâhmana" (i. 2).

they started building without delay, and such rapid progress did they make in digging the foundations that the Gods became affrighted and took counsel amongst themselves as to what had best be done.

"Shall we rest quietly," said they, "whilst the Titans are preparing to invade Heaven? Never shall it be said that we who overcame so many foes in the past were found wanting on this occasion."

So when the Titans were making a start with their tower, Indra, the King of Heaven, appeared amongst them, disguised as a Brahmin and carrying a brick to which was tied an invisible rope of lightning.

"O Titans," said he, "I have brought you a charmed brick to lay in the foundation of your tower. Whatever is built upon it will stand firm as a rock." The Titans were delighted with the gift, and erected on it their tower, which soon reached to Heaven itself. Thinking that their hour of triumph had come, they began clambering up the lofty edifice when, without warning, Indra pulled away the foundation brick by means of the invisible rope of lightning, and down crashed the Titans, who were scattered to the four corners of the earth. Broken into atoms by the force of their fall, the pieces took the form of spiders, or *Urnanāvah*. There were, however, two Titans who had managed to reach Heaven. They were at once transformed into dogs, and are known as the two stars Canis major and Canis minor.

 $^{^{1}}$ " Taittirya Brâhmana " (i. 1. 2. 5. 6); see also " Kânwa-Shatapatha."

XXVIII. THE ORIGIN OF MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS.

[This Myth anticipated by some two thousand years the theories of modern geology as to the formation of the earth's crust.]

When the world was young the solar deities, the Adityas and the Angirâsas, were contending with one another as to who should first get to Heaven. The Angirâsas chose from among themselves one, Agni by name, and sent him as their messenger to the Adityas. "Go thou," said they, "and tell the Adityas that by means of a Soma sacrifice which we shall make to-morrow we will reach Heaven before them."

Agni duly delivered his message to the Adityas, who replied; "Is that the intention of the Angirasas? Very well. We will steal a march on them by having our Soma sacrifice forthwith, and you, O Agni, must act as our Hotâr or High Priest."

Agni promised to do so, and sped back to the Angirâsas with the message. "Thou hast, of course, declined the request of the Adityas," said they. "No, I could not do so," answered Agni, "for it is not permissible to refuse one's services as a sacrificial priest unless one is already engaged in a sacrifice, or restricted from performing one."

Accordingly, Agni returned to act as Hotâr to the Adityas, and the Angirâsas were asked to help with the sacrifice. This they did, and as a reward the Earth was given to them. But when they took her in their hands, lo! she burnt them and they hastily flung her from them. By this means were caused the markings and cleavages which we know as the mountains and valleys.¹

XXIX. THE ORIGIN OF THE CONSTELLATION ORION.

In ages long past Prajâpati, the Lord of Creatures, had committed an Akritam (that which ought not to be done), or, in other words, a crime. Now the evil deed of Prajâpati had become incarnate in the shape of a devil which the Gods were anxious to be rid of so that the crime should be annulled. Consulting with each other they formed from out of themselves a new deity, Bhutavân by name, and to him they said, "Prajâpati has committed a deadly sin which has taken unto itself the form of a fiend. Kill thou this monster and free us from its presence."

Without more ado Bhutavân attacked the phantom, piercing him with an arrow. Thus wounded, the demon, with Bhutavân in pursuit, fled to Heaven, where both became part of the constellation Orion. The evil spirit has become known as Mriga (the Deer), and his foe as Mriga-vyādha (Hunter of the Deer), and they are both stars of the great Orion.²

^{1 &}quot;Aitareya-Brâhmana" (vi. 1. 34-35).

² "Aitareya-Brâhmana" (iii. 3. 33).

XXX. WHAT THE RIVERS SAY.

[The Atharva-Veda (iii. 13. 1) thus addresses the rivers: "Since formerly ye resounded (nûd) when the Dragon (Vritra) was slain, thenceforth shall ye be streams (nadi) by name."]

WE have already seen how Indra had killed the mighty giant Vritra. For long had Vritra openly defied him; but, strengthened by draughts of life-giving liquor brewed from the Soma vine which Gâyatri, in the form of an eagle, had stolen for him, Indra had at last triumphed and won for himself the title "Mohendra," or Great Indra.

Heaven and Earth resounded with his praises, and the great rivers on their way to the sea murmured unceasingly, "A-la-lâ, A-la-lâ." "What say ye, O ye Rivers?" And for answer spake the mighty streams, "We sing the praises of him who slew the mighty Vritra, the great Indra, whose thunderbolt laid low his foe." ¹

XXXI. WHY THE GREAT BEAR IS SO NAMED.

ALL of us have gazed at the constellation of seven bright stars known as the Great Bear, and some of us have wondered how it came by its name. This is how it happened.

Thousands of years ago these never-changing stars were called *Riksha* by the Vedic writers, meaning "the bright ones," the word being taken from the root *Rich*,

^{1 &}quot;Rig-Veda" (iii. 5. 4. 18. 6-7).

to be bright. Curiously enough the word *Riksha* had another meaning, namely "Bear," possibly from the fact that that animal was possessed of extremely bright eyes, or because of his tawny coat. In course of time the original designation of brightness was forgotten, and popular imagination identified the constellation as the Bear.¹

XXXII. THE ORIGIN OF THE MYTH OF PROMETHEUS.

THE story of Prometheus, and his bringing down fire from heaven, in all probability owes its origin to the Promontho of the Vedas, one of the many names of Fire, or Agni (Latin, *Ignis*).

Thousands of years ago the common ancestors of the Greeks and Hindus must have brought with them from their first dwelling-place, probably in Central Asia, their names for fire, amongst which are to be particularly noted the Hindu Promontho and the corresponding Greek Prometheus.

The word Promontho owes its origin to the fact that in olden times fire was produced by "Promonthon," or the rubbing together of two pieces of wood. The wood literally means "churning fire by friction," and refers to the process still in vogue by which fire is produced. The method is as follows. Two pieces of wood, known as the Arani, are procured. One of them, known as the lower Arani, or Adharârani is a square piece of wood, slightly hollowed out, with holes drilled through

¹ Sayana on "Riksha" ("Rig-Veda," i. 2. 1. 24. 10). See also Max Müller's Science of Language, vol. ii., pp. 395-399.

the sides. At each end of it are nailed two upright pieces of wood, across the top of which is laid the upper Arani, or Uttarârani, in the middle of which a hole is bored. A stick is then sharpened at both ends, one being inserted in the hole made in the upper Arani while the other rests in the hollow of the lower Arani. Round this stick, or churning-rod, a rope or cord is wound. This being pulled rapidly backwards and forwards causes the stick to revolve, and soon produces sparks which fly out from the holes of the lower Arani and are caught on tinder placed near by. The process of fire-churning is a very laborious one, and at least two persons must take part in it. For this reason, doubtless, Manu, the lawgiver, lavs down severe penalties for "thefts of fire." Matches are of course a modern invention, and probably the production of sparks with steel and flint was unknown in Ancient India.1

XXXIII. THE ORIGIN OF IRON.

[In India the blacksmiths have a secret hiding-place with which the thieves in the neighbourhood are acquainted. Should a thief require a jemmy, he leaves iron and money at this spot and the blacksmith takes them away, makes the jemmy and leaves it in the same place, from which the thief fetches it away. It is from this custom that the Indian saying arises, "Thieves and blacksmiths never meet."]

ONCE upon a time in ages long past, Indra hurled his thunderbolt after one of the Giants, the traditional foes of Heaven. Missing its mark the thunderbolt

¹ For the Vedic origin of the word Prometheus, see Cox's Mythology of the Aryan Nations, vol. ii., chap. iv., sec. i.

crashed into a plantain tree, where it quickly cooled and became what we know as steel or iron.

It is said that a thief who was near by took the iron to a blacksmith, and from it was made the first jemmy.¹

XXXIV. THE ORIGIN OF THE THUNDER PEAL.

[The Indo-Aryans believed in a separate deity not only for every natural phenomenon but even for each of the human organs. They had Gods for the ears, the eyes, and other parts of the body. As the following Myth shows, the roaring of thunder was attributed to Rudra.]

In Vedic mythology the fire of the thunderbolt is a God named Rudra, or one who roars or makes a noise like thunder. How Rudra first began to roar is related as follows:

One day, whilst the Gods were fighting with the Giants, Rudra seized his opportunity and proceeded to help himself to their treasures. The Gods, however, soon discovered their loss, and took back their belongings from the thief by force. Rudra began to bellow at the loss of his ill-gotten gains, and from that time forward was known as the "Roarer," and the noise which he makes is known to mortals as the pealing of thunder.²

XXXV. THE ORIGIN OF THE TOBACCO PLANT.

Once upon a time there lived and died a damsel whose hand no one had asked in marriage. Now amongst the ¹ Folk-lore. ² "Taittirya-Brâhmana."

Hindus it is reckoned a disgrace for a girl to remain unmarried, and it is related that this poor creature died of a broken heart.

The story goes that the Gods were moved to pity at what had happened. "Poor girl," said they, "whilst she was alive no one wanted her, but now that she is dead we will see that all men ask for her." So saying the Gods turned her ashes into the tobacco plant, and ever since, from far and near, men have come for its leaves. So it was that she who had been passed by in life was wanted by all men after her death. Such is the story of the tobacco plant.1

XXXVI. WHY THE FOX HAS A BLACK TIP TO HIS TAIL.

ONCE upon a time a fox and a kite were such good friends that they used to search for their food together. At length there came a time of dearth and they were at their wits' end to get a meal, so putting their heads together they planned nothing more nor less than to raid a village! With great cunning they set a rumour afloat that the particular village was to be looted by an army next day, and they took special pains that the story should reach the ears of the inhabitants. On the morrow the wily fox took an earthen vessel and, drumming it with all his might, advanced towards the village. At the same time the kite flew backwards and forwards overhead, uttering shrill cries. The foolish villagers, remembering the tales they had

¹ Folk-lore.

heard, were convinced that the enemy was at hand, and left the village in a body.

The bird and the beast now had their opportunity, and at once began to ransack the houses, gobbling up all the nicest things they could find. But it happened that one infirm and aged woman had been left in the village, and when she saw no marauding foe, but only the fox and the kite making merry, she crawled to the jungle and told her friends. Back they came in haste and caught the fox as he was helping himself to their food. Seizing anything they could find, they started to give the wily animal a sound thrashing. "You cannot kill me by beating me," said the fox to his captors. "I can only be killed by fire."

So the villagers tied rags which had been soaked in oil to his tail and set them on fire. The fox set off with the end of his tail alight, and jumping from house to house set fire to the thatch. The flames spread rapidly and soon the whole village was burnt down. The fox then made for a tank and jumping into the water extinguished the burning oil, and from that time has had a burnt tip to his tail.¹

XXXVII. WHY THE SEA IS SALT.

KRISHNA, the pastoral god of India, was fond of piping, and so became beloved by the shepherdesses of Vraja. Oft by moonlight would he dance with them by the amorous flood of Jumnâ, the river-sister of Yama, the God of the Dead. Sometimes, when tired of dancing,

 $^{^{1}\,\}mathrm{Folk\text{-}lore}$ (see Folk-lore of the Santhal-Pergunnah, by C. H. Bompas).

the God would steal away to the solitude of the woods, and seated by the side of a running stream play sweet music. It fell out that one day when he had thus withdrawn himself he came to the banks of a beauteous river which, bright with lotuses and rippling like the tresses of a maiden, gently murmured on its way. As the river flowed by she laved the feet of Krishna with her wavelets and took him captive with her charms.

Filled with desire, he began to weep for her, and his tears mingled with her waters. In a twinkling there appeared before him a damsel of bewitching beauty, who was none other than the river itself in female form. She took her name from the river and was known as Virojâ and in course of time she bore a child to the God. No lovers were ever happier than were these twain, but with Gods as with mortals true love seldom runs smoothly.

One day, we are told, Krishna came to visit his beloved Goddess, when, just as he arrived, their babe started crying. Leaving Krishna the Goddess went to quiet it but on her return Krishna had left. Knowing that amongst his loves was Râdhâ, the fairest shepherdess of Vraja, Virojâ thought that Krishna had gone to her. Ablaze with jealousy, she turned to her child and cursed it, saying, "O thou unlucky child, thy crying has sent from me my beloved one. The tears thou sheddest are salt, and so shall ever be the sea into which I change thee."

And it happened as Virojâ said, and the waters of the ocean have ever been salt and no man can drink thereof.¹

^{1 &}quot; Brahmâ-Vaivarta Purânam," (iii. 3).

XXXVIII. WHY THERE ARE BLACK SPOTS IN THE MOON.

[Another Folk-tale tells us that the black parts of the moon are the figure of an old woman with her spinning-wheel. She is weaving wool, which is represented by the bright parts of the lunar surface.]

WE have seen how Soma, the Moon, had been cursed by Dakshya, his father-in-law, for his undue partiality to Rohini, one of his twenty-seven wives, and how he had wasted away in consequence.¹

The story is varied in another Folk-tale which tells us that Dakshya's daughters repented of their conduct in complaining to their father of their husband's waning affection for them. Dakshya then called in the Aswinis, the physicians of the Gods, and the Castor and Pollux of Vedic tradition, to cure the Moon of his complaint. "Thou must keep thy lungs warm," said they to the Moon, "and thou canst best do so by holding a woolly goat to thy chest." And the dark spots that are seen in the Moon are nothing but the figure of this goat.²

XXXIX. WHY THE MONKEY HAS A BAGGY MOUTH.

ONCE upon a time a monkey, who was half starved, had searched wood after wood for food, but could find nothing but withered leaves to eat. At last he espied the footprints of animals, and these he followed until presently

¹ Myth XII.

WHY THE MONKEY HAS A BAGGY MOUTH 43

he found himself in another forest. The first living thing he met was a deer.

"Whither art thou going, brother Deer?" asked the monkey.

"I am going to a feast," answered the deer, and with that away he flew as if on wings.

The poor monkey ran after him, but, weak as he was from want of something to eat, could not keep up with him, and soon sat down by the wayside tired and panting for breath. He had not long to wait before he saw a wolf running past him.

"Hullo, brother Wolf," cried the monkey, "whither art thou going?"

"I am going to a feast," growled the wolf, and sped on.

The monkey again followed as far as his strength would allow, and then again sat down to recover his breath. Next he saw a tiger going in the same direction.

"Uncle Tiger," panted the monkey, "whither art thou going?"

"I am going to a feast, thou brown rascal," replied the tiger haughtily, and away he bounded.

Once more the monkey tried to follow, and by dint of running and resting at intervals he at last came to the dwelling-place of a hermit. He found the holy man surrounded by a crowd of wild animals which he had apparently tamed. All of them were waiting to be fed, and the monkey squeezed himself in amongst them and waited for the feast to begin. He had not been sitting there long before the saint brought the food which he had gathered and gave each animal his share, but when the monkey held out his hand there was nothing left for him.

"I am dying of hunger," moaned the monkey. "Have pity on me, I pray you, and give me something to eat."

The good man was moved at the plight of the poor monkey, and directed him to a mango tree which was loaded with ripe fruit, saying, "Had I known thou wert coming I should have had food ready for thee. However, thou canst help thyself to the mangoes, but see to it that thou dost not eat more than five."

The monkey ran at once to the tree, and paying no attention to what the holy man had said began to eat as many mangoes as he could, and came back with his mouth stuffed full of them.

"What," cried the Hermit, when he saw him, "thou hast chosen to disobey me, and stuff thy mouth with forbidden fruit! Henceforth, I tell thee, thy mouth shall always be distended."

And true to the words of the saint every monkey has a baggy mouth to this day.

XL. THE ORIGIN OF THE TULSI (BASIL) PLANT.

ONCE upon a time there dwelt among mortals a woman, Tulsi by name, who longed to win a God as her husband, and among the Gods none other than Vishnu himself. With a view to fitting herself for her new position she began to practise austerities, and it was not long before Lakshmi, Goddess of Wrath and consort of Vishnu, heard what was taking place. Filled with jealousy, for the gods are not exempt from the weaknesses of

mortals, and unable to brook the idea of a rival, the Goddess straightway changed Tulsi into the plant which has ever since borne her name and which has remained a sacred one in India.1

XLL. THE ORIGIN OF THE PEARL.

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear."

When the poet wrote these lines he was no doubt referring to the pearl which is found in the ocean depths. Have you ever asked yourselves where pearls come from ? How are they formed? Here is a bit of Vedic folk-lore about their origin.

Pearls are formed, says the legend, either by the transformation of raindrops falling into the sea or by lightning flashing into an open sea-shell.

In the Atharva-Veda there is a magic mantra or charm against evils which may be translated as follows: "Born from the lightning's flash, may this golden shell of pearl protect us from all harm." 2

XLIL THE ORIGIN OF FEVER.

ONCE upon a time Mahâdeva, God of Destruction, who often remained wrapped in fits of meditation for periods of a thousand years at a time, was in one of his age-long trances. The powers of darkness, seeing him thus

¹ The "Purânas."

² "Atharva Veda," (iv. 10. 1); "Indische Sprüche," 344.

engaged, had no longer any fear of him, and, coming from their hiding-places like owls at night, began to spoil the sacrifices of Gods and Sages. Now the latter did not dare to disturb the mighty Mahâdeva, and were at their wits' end to know how they might drive away the demons of night. In their perplexity they sought advice from Dakshya, the father-in-law of Mahâdeva, and he suggested making a great sacrifice to avert the evil influences which were at work. In due course the sacrifice was begun, but Dakshya, whilst bidding to it all the other Gods of Heaven and the Sages of Earth, had deliberately left out Mahâdeva, as he supposed he was still deep in meditation. Now it unluckily happened that at that very moment Mahâdeva woke from his trance and saw what had happened. Filled with anger at the slight which had been offered to him, he looked around him, and as he did so his wrath increased the more until finally it took to itself the form of an arrow of fire which shot forth and scattered the powers of darkness. Then, whirling round, it severed the head of Dakshya from his shoulders and finally returned to Mahâdeva.

"O God of Destruction," spake the Arrow, the embodiment of the God's wrath, "I have driven away the fiends of darkness and punished him who sought to hold thee in contempt. What future services can I render thee?"

"Thou hast done well, mine Arrow," replied Mahâdeva, "Go thou forth and for all time live amongst mankind, and be known as fever, the scourge of mortals."

And so it was that Fever came to afflict mankind.1

¹ The "Mahâbhârata,"

XLIII. THE ORIGIN OF THE RAINBOW.

In all countries and in every age poets have sung of the Rainbow. What child is there who has not felt joy at the sight of it? Have you ever thought what causes the rainbow, or how it is formed? Science may furnish a reason, but here let us give the answer as made by Folk-lore.

The story runs that the Rainbow is the Bow of Indra, or the "Indra-Dhanu." With it he shoots the mighty thunderbolt when fighting with the Giants, bending it as he does so. According to one account the Bow is formed from jets of poison ejected by a huge snake called Kula-Nâga, whilst another story says it is the snake itself which, striped in all colours, stretches forth its interminable length through the heavens.

XLIV. WHY THE PEACOCK HAS ITS MANY-EYED PLUMAGE.

THE peacock, the bird of Karthik, generalissimo of the Gods, did not always have its present brilliant plumage, and this is the story told as to how the sacred bird first obtained it.

It is said that at one time Râvana, the ten-headed demon King of Lankâ, had become so powerful that he had almost reduced the other Gods to the position of vassals. He had made the Sun to shine mildly upon Lankâ, the Moon to shed its full lustre at night, and

the winds to blow gently at all times. Needless to say the Gods became much alarmed at these proofs of his increasing power and were much exercised as to the course they should take.

On one occasion a certain King Marutta had arranged a great sacrifice, and the Gods had come down from Heaven to be present at it when of a sudden Râvana appeared. There was consternation amongst the Gods, who fled and hid themselves wherever they could. Indra, God of a thousand eyes, entered the body of a peacock, then a bird of sober plumage.

As soon as Râvana was gone, Indra came forth and thus addressed the peacock, "Thou hast rendered me no small service, O Bird, by giving me a haven whilst the demon of the ten heads was here. To show my gratitude I will henceforth transfer my thousand eyes to thy plumage."

And from that time the Peacock, with the many eyes on its feathers, has been the most brilliant of birds.¹

XLV. THE ORIGIN OF THE WINDS.

THE Mârutas (Sanskrit for winds) are said to be the offspring of the demi-urge Kâshyapa and his wife Diti. To them was born a wind with power as great as that of Indra himself. It was not to be expected that Indra could brook a rival, and straightway he cut into forty-nine pieces the wind-child of Kâshyapa and Diti, thus forming the forty-nine winds of Hindu mythology. These winds one and all began to sob and

¹ The "Râmâyana."

moan. "Mâ-rodhi-ha" (Do not cry), said Indra to them, and these words spoken quickly became Mâruta, the name given to the Winds.

XLVI. THE ORIGIN OF THE POLE-STAR.

According to Hindu mythology the Pole-star was originally named Dhruva, the Unchanging, and was grandson to Manu, the Self-Existent. The following fable tells us of his transformation into a celestial body.

It is said that King Pryavrata, son of Manu, had two sons, one of whom, Dhruva, was his heir, being the child of his elder Queen, Suniti. The other was known as Uttama, and was the offspring of the younger and betterloved Queen, Suruchi. One day, so runs the tale, King Pryavrata was seated on his throne, with his favourite queen Suruchi close beside him and the little Uttama on his knees, when Dhruva came running up, and, stretching out his arms, asked to be lifted up and placed beside his step-brother. King Pryavrata glanced from Dhruva to Suruchi, and, seeing a look of displeasure on the latter's face, hesitated, and finally refused to take Dhruva on to his knee. The child persisted, however, until finally Suruchi began to scold him.

"O Dhruva," said she, "I, thy father's favourite Queen, did not bear thee. How, then, darest thou wish to sit in the place which belongs of right to Uttama, my son? Get thee hence at once."

1 "Vishnu-Purâna." The expression "forty-nine winds," when applied to persons has passed into common usage, and implies madness.

The boy said not a word, but ran weeping to his mother, Suniti, and told her what Suruchi had said to him.

"My poor boy," said Suniti, as she kissed away his tears, "thou must, indeed, have been born under an unlucky star or else how comes it that such cruel words could have been uttered to thee? But perhaps it is thy destiny and not thy step-mother thou shouldst blame. 'As ye sow so shall ye reap,' runs the adage, and it may be that thou art now reaping the fruits of that which was sown by thee in a previous existence. Deeds, good or bad, never die, but survive as an Adrishta, or unseen force, which works out its appointed destiny for good or ill. Hast thou not seen that as water flows down hill so does fortune follow in the footsteps of those whom Heaven favours? To such as these are given the umbrellas of Kings, the fastest steeds and the best elephants. Therefore, my son, be thou content with thy lot. Has it not been written?

> The moving Finger writes and, having writ, Moves on; nor all thy Piety nor Wit Shall lure it back to cancel half a line, Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it."

Throwing his arms around his mother's neck, Dhruva cried out, "What thou sayest, Mother dear, may no doubt be true, but thy words bring me little happiness. My father prefers Uttama to me because of the mother that bore him. But let that pass, and if the throne must be Uttama's I am content. As for me, I will devote myself to a spiritual existence, and perchance may attain to a position beyond the reach of Kings."

With these words the little Dhruva, then but a child of five years old, slipped away from his mother's side,

and under cover of night crept into the forest. There. in the depths of the wood, far from the haunts of man, he began to practise such penances and austerities that soon the Gods became alarmed, fearing that he would become possessed of undue powers. Nor was their apprehension groundless, for ere long the Spirit of Vishnu, the Soul of the World, entered into Dhruva, and with a movement of his leg he could make the world turn over. the mountains shake and the seas overflow. The Gods tried their best to divert him from the manner of life which he had chosen, and to terrify him by assuming the threatening shapes of demons, lions and tigers. But all to no purpose, for the boy hermit, with his mind centred on Vishnu alone, was unconscious of their presence. At length the Gods appealed to Vishnu himself, who listened to their prayer, and appearing in all his godly majesty before Dhruva asked the boy what boon he wished for.

In fear and trembling did Dhruva fall at the feet of Vishnu. "O Lord, I am but a little child," said he. "I know not how to address thee nor the hymns I should sing in thy praise. Thou art the one reality. All else is but Mâyâ or emptiness. Strip the plantain tree of its layers one by one and soon nothing remains. So with the universe itself. Divest it of its trappings and lo! naught is left save thee, O Vishnu, the Soul of all things. Mine eyes have seen thee and my heart can wish for no greater boon."

"O Grandson of Manu, the Self-Existent," exclaimed Vishnu, "thy answer fills me with joy. Born as thou wert to an exalted position, yet to a still higher rank will I raise thee. Thou shalt have a place in heaven above Surya, the Sun, above Soma, the Moon, and

above all the heavenly bodies. Verily thou shalt become Dhruva Târâ, or the Pole-star, and the *Saptarshi*, or Seven Stars of the Great Bear, shall be thy attendants, moving round thee for all eternity."

So ends the Myth of the Pole-star.1

XLVII. THE ORIGIN OF THE VOLCANO.

ONCE upon a time a king named Kalmashpada had been hunting on a mountain-side, where many bears, lions and tigers had fallen to his spear. At last, tired and worn out, he began to retrace his steps homeward, but of a sudden found his way barred by one Shaktri, son of his priest Vashishtha.

"O King, I pray thee step aside and let me pass," said Shaktri. "Thou knowest that a Brahmin is above a King, and it is for the latter to make room for the former."

"O Brahmin," answered Kalmâshpada, "a King is a God on earth, and so is above a Brahmin. Therefore do thou step aside and let me go my way."

But Shaktri would not budge, and the King at last pushed him away and passed on. At this the Brahmin, greatly enraged, pronounced a curse upon him, saying, "O thou wicked King, thy conduct is more befitting a Râkshasa, or Demon, therefore be thou transformed into one." And hardly had the words been uttered when it was as the Brahmin had willed it, and the King was turned into a Râkshasa. But the curse was destined to recoil on him who uttered it, for the Demon at once fell on Shaktri and ate him up.

^{1 &}quot;Vishnu-Purâna."

It was not long before the tragic news of Shaktri's death reached his father's ears. Beside himself with grief at the loss of his son, Vashishtha sought his death by jumping into a river with hands and feet bound, but the stream loosened his bonds and washed him ashore. And from that day the river has been known as the Beyah or Bipâshâ, river of the Punjab, the name signifying the Loosener of Bonds.

Although thus frustrated in his effort to kill himself, Vashishtha determined to make yet another attempt, so making his way to a second river he again threw himself in. But lo! the waters divided themselves into a hundred small streams and left him high and dry. Hence comes the name of the famous Shatadru, the River with a Hundred Branches, which, known as the modern Sutlunites with the Beyah or Bipâshâ and forms the Hyphases of the Greeks.

Hearing what had happened, Adrishvanti, the widow of Shaktri, sought her father-in-law, and thus addressed him, "O Father, forbear, I implore thee, and do not seek further to take thy life because thou hast lost Shaktri, thy son, for I tell thee that a child of his will yet be born."

Comforted by what he had heard, Vashishtha returned home with his daughter-in-law, and in due course a son was born to Shaktri and called Parâshara. The boy was brought up as the son of Vashishtha, whom he regarded as his father. One day, however, his mother determined to let him know the truth, and thus addressed him:

"Vashishtha is not thy father, my child, but thy father's father. Alas, he whose son thou art was devoured by a Râkshasa before thou wast born."

Now when Parâshara heard this he was filled with a desire to avenge his father's death, and made a vow to destroy every Râkshasa in the universe. So he made a Râkshasa-Satra, or a sacrifice having as its object the destruction of the Râkshasa race. A huge fire was lighted, and into its mighty flames were drawn by means of mantras, or incantations, all the Râkshasas, young and old, fight as they might to keep away. As they were flung on the sacrificial fires their screams and lamentations well-nigh rent the sky. Roused by the cries from his meditations, the sage Pulasta, who had been transformed into a star belonging to the constellation of the Great Bear, appeared before Parâshara.

"Knowest thou not, O Parâshara," said he, "that dness and not cruelty, forgiveness and not revenge, are the chief virtues of a Brahmin? Yet is thy heart filled with vengeance against all Râkshasas, because, forsooth, one of them did slay thy father. But bear thou in mind, O Parâshara, that Shaktri, thy father, had cursed a king and transformed him into the Râkshasa who devoured him. His death was due to the act of his own creation, so I pray you forbear and think well before thou destroyest more of these beings against whom thy soul is filled with wrath."

To the prayers of Pulasta were added those of Vashishtha, and moved by their appeal Parâshara desisted from the sacrifice which he had begun, and cast the fire into the hollow of a mountain cave. Thence at intervals of time it throws up flames of fire as if seeking to consume the Râkshasas who had been spared by Parâshara.

Such was the origin of the Volcano.1

¹ The "Mahâbhârata."

XLVIII. THE ORIGIN OF THE SUN.

ADITI, the Everlasting, mother of the Heavens, had borne the eight Adityas or solar deities. Seven of them she reared, but with the eighth, which had neither shape nor form, she knew not what to do. In her dilemma she called to her aid Twashtâ, or Vishwakarmâ, the artisan of the Gods, and asked him to mould it into shape so that it might pass for a God.

Now it is to Vishwakarmâ that the work of giving shape to aught in air, water or earth is entrusted, and he threw himself heart and soul into his task. The result was Vishwakarmâ's greatest masterpiece, for out of the shapeless mass which Aditi had given him he fashione Vivaswât, the glorious Sun!

Such is the fable of the Sun's origin.1

XLIX. THE ORIGIN OF THE ELEPHANT.

We have just read how Vishwakarmâ moulded what was originally but a shapeless mass into the mighty orb of Heaven, the Sun. We have yet to hear that he also created the elephant, but so it was. For when the artisan of the Gods was shaping the Sun he cut off the superfluous pieces which, falling to earth, became elephants. And is not the elephant almost as shapeless as the mass from which the Sun was formed? At any rate it was in such fashion, we are told, that the elephant came into existence.²

THE ORIGIN OF DEATH.

In days of old, when the world was still young, Prajapati, Lord of Creation, was much perplexed as to how he was to find room for the creatures he had made, which were multiplying at a great rate. He had not thought of this happening when he first created the inhabitants of the earth, and he taxed his brains as to the best means of keeping down the numbers. He thought and thought, but puzzle his brains as he might he could not find a way out of the difficulty. Worn out at last he gave way to wrath, and the fire of his anger issued forth and began to consume his creatures.

Not wishing to see this fair world wiped out of existence, Gods intervened, and presently the phantom of his wrath stood with folded hands in the presence of Prajâpati. "O my Lord," said he, "for what purpose hast thou created me? What work am I to perform?"

"O Death, for that shall be thy name," answered Prajâpati, "go thou and dwell on earth and carry off the diseased and aged amongst my creatures, that they may not continue to multiply beyond the capacity of the world to contain them."

Bowing low, the phantom went away to perform his work of destruction, which has continued ever since, and so it was that Death came to the World.¹

¹ The "Mahâbhârata."

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